



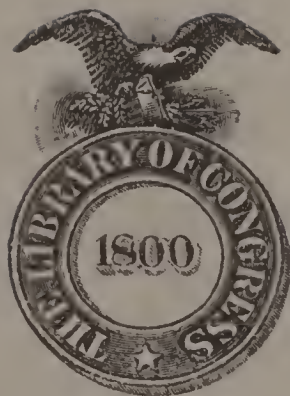
CHIAROSCURO

A Book of Poems

By

BENJAMIN FRANCIS MUSSER





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CHIAROSCURO



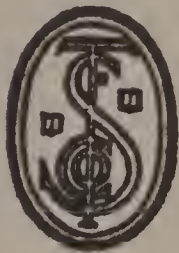
Benjamin Francis Musser

CHIAROSCURO

BY
BENJAMIN FRANCIS MUSSER

INTRODUCTION BY
KATHERINE BRÉGY, *Litt. D.*

WITH PORTRAIT



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DEDICATION

Go, little book, to her who holds the all of me her heart within; go swift to her whose soul enfolds the good of me and shrives the sin; to her whose mind and instinct know her lad far better than does he; who loves away his moods of woe and, when his colors leap with glee upon the verbal canvas laid, who gives his painting life, to show *chiaroscuro—light and shade*—to her, my WIFE, little book, go.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

SOME of these poems have already appeared in *The Magnificat*, the *Newark Monitor*, *The Trend*, *The Sentinel*, *The Living Church*, *The Rosary Magazine*, *The Lamp*, *The Freeman's Journal*, and *The Catholic Standard and Times*.

INTRODUCTION

IT is doubtful if ever, since those finely and feverishly articulate Elizabethan days, so many young people have been writing verse in English. Certainly never before have so many been turning *con amore* to the lyric on both sides of the Atlantic. And scarcely anything better for poetry could happen—except, perhaps, that all the world should suddenly turn with love “sudden and swift” (*and* discriminating!) to the reading and buying of good verse when it is written. For poetry was meant to be a part of life, not apart *from* life—a natural artistic expression of natural, varying moods. It has been this whenever it has contrived to be both great and popular: that is to say universal. And it can also be this in the honest work of the self-confessed minor poet.

Indeed, there is a valid place for the so-called “minor” poet, both in literature and in life. First of all, he is a most serviceable bridge between the two. He is a practical purveyor of beauty, an interpreter of the delicate fancies which float like white butterflies just above the harvest-fields of our everydays. He does not take himself too seriously—except, perhaps, at moments—nor us too seriously. He laughs with those who laugh, and weeps with those who weep, and is, betimes, pious and perverse and jocular. A great critic once declared that the whole future of the English drama lay hid in the question: Do people go to

the theatre to get away from life or to see life portrayed? But the trouble and the truth seem always to have been that they go for both reasons—or for each reason at different times. And it is precisely the same with poetry. . . .

There is a very happy mixture of fact and fancy, of realism and reverie and romance in this first slim quiver of Benjamin Francis Musser's poetic arrows. He is delightfully and humanly inconsistent—and sincere. One finds him almost equally convincing as a cynically or sentimentally minded sophomore, a humorous dreamer, a devotee, and a man who has claimed life's little share of love and pain. In fact, the things I myself like best in "*Chiaroscuro*" are the Christmas poem, *A Child, to The Child*, the daintily disedifying *Such is Life*, the fine bold imagery of the *Marriage of the Mist*, and the ingenuous wisdom of all such devotional fragments as *I, Brother Mole*. This is but a personal verdict. Others may find very different things to praise or to blame in the mingled light and shade of the volume—one does not know.

But I think I do know how to trace the chief influences of Mr. Musser's muse—always an expected thing for the captious critic who seeks to explain any "new" poet. These influences are, I should say, three. The first is Peter Pan, that elfin boy who learned to fly and to find pretty names for everything, and who flatly refused to grow up and become President of the United States! The second is Pierrot, immemorial King of the Sophisticates, who mocks with a tear in his eye and always tries to seem far more artificial, far more disenchanted, than he really is. And the last is the gentle, humorous, naïve old child of a friar whom an-

other poet (Joyce Kilmer) called "Christ's plaything,
Brother Juniper."

To fuse into harmony these three strains has been
the work of Mr. Musser's own unique personality—
and the justification of his poems. It should be the
justification of his readers, also.

KATHERINE BRÉGY

Philadelphia, 1923

CONTENTS

DAWN O' LIFE

	Page
"ALL GLORIOUS WITHIN" . . .	17
A CHILD, TO THE CHILD . . .	18
LITTLE RHYMES FOR LITTLE PEOPLE . . .	19
MAY PROCESSION	21
CHILDREN	23

APPROACHING NOON

ADOLESCENCE	27
FIRE OF LIFE	28
THE ADOLESCENT	29
VIRGINIA	31
ON SEEING A BROCHURE CALLED "HOW TO LIVE A HUNDRED YEARS"	32
THE HIGH ROMANCE	34

MOTLEY

MY HOUSE	37
DECEMBER THIRTY-FIRST	38
JANUARY FIRST	39
WAITING	40
BEFORE THE DAWN	41
ALTAR OF THE SKY	43
MARRIAGE OF THE MIST	44
THE ALSO-RAN	45
CRITICISM	47

BLINDNESS OF LOVE	48
TO A CONFIDENTIAL DIARY	49
MEDIEVALISM	50
OLD SWEETHEARTS	51
A WOMAN SMILES	52
TO A TYPEWRITER	53
THE CHOIR AT THE SAVIOUR, MOSCOW	54

CAP AND BELLS

ON A PORTRAIT OF A FRANCISCAN	57
ON A MINIATURE OF THE DUCHESS	58
SHE WAITED IN VAIN FOR HER LOVER	59
SPRING IN THE CITY	62
DOLCE FAR NIENTE	63
CENTO AFTER READING THE LE GALLIENE ANTHOLOGY OF ENGLISH VERSE	64
SUCH IS LIFE	66
PHLEGMATIC PROSE	68
LOVE NOT	69
TO THE UNKNOWN GOD	70
MY ITALY	71

WHITE FLAMES

ONCE TO EVERY MAN	75
WISTARIA	76
MILADY WAKES	77
HEART'S GARDEN	78
INITIATION	79
THE UTTERMOST	80
IN HARBOR	82
THE MIRACLE	83
AWAKENING	84

IN SANCTUARY

THE CHAMELON	87
IN A GARDEN	88
THE LITTLE DAY	90
I, BROTHER MOLE	91
MENTAL PRAYER	92
MYSTICAL COMMUNION	93
MOTHER O' MINE	94
INTERCESSION	95
CLOISTERED	96
BALLADE OF THE SORROWFUL MOTHER	97
PHILANTHROPY	98
LITTLE, LITTLE FLOWER	99
IN THE LANTERN BEAMS	100
LOVE'S PRAYER	101
A NOVICE, ON THE LADY POVERTY	102

ON POETS AND POETRY

THE MUSIC OF POETRY	105
TO ALL TRUE POETS	107
BEFORE COMES THE ANGEL DEATH	108
BAUDELAIRE	109
TO JOHN BANNISTER TABB	110
"WHO IS LIONEL JOHNSON?"	111
STILL-BORN	112
THE SEALED DOOR	113
A POET, TO MOTHERS OF MEN	114
PANTOUM	115
TO A WEED	117

QUATRAINS

ROMA—AMOR	121
TO FRANCIS THOMPSON	121
THE CHORD	121
EVOLUTION	121
THE CATHEDRAL	122
POSTHUMOUS	122
TO A CIGARETTE	122

IN MEMORIAM

“A FIRE SHALL BURN BEFORE HIM”	125
BILLY	126
THE NURSERIES OF HEAVEN	127
MEMORIAL DAY	129
 EPIGRAMS, APHORISMS, MAXIMS	 133

DAWN O' LIFE

“ALL GLORIOUS WITHIN”

Beauty? I name it—

Heart of a child!

Let no one shame it;

Beauty I name it.

All undefiled

Into life came it.

O heart of a child!

Beauty—I crave it,

Lover of hearts.

Let others waive it;

Beauty, I crave it.

Not such as parts:

As the child's, save it,

O Lover of hearts!

A CHILD, TO THE CHILD

With empty hands, beneath a sky
Where glistens one great star apart,
I kneel. No frankincense have I;
All that I have is this poor heart.

I kneel in crystal drops of dew
With gentle ox and ass and sheep.
A Ladye lets me look at You,
Her little Child, her Babe asleep.

O little Brother, Jhesu sweet,
I kiss Your still unwounded feet
And hands, and bathe with loving tears
Where some day cruel nails shall pierce.

That Ladye fair who gave to me
Your hand to cuddle to my heart,
Said maybe some day You would be
Of my poor self a very part:

She talked to me of Food and Drink.
Somehow, my little Love, I think
I see, far off, tall candles burn;
I see a man with Something turn

And come to me; quite still I kneel
And wait. . . . And then, somehow, I feel
You have gone back to heaven and You
Have carried most of me there, too.

LITTLE RHYMES FOR LITTLE PEOPLE

DINNER

How nice when Nora ties our bibs
And brings our porridge cup!
Then little spoons go clipper-clap,
So fast they eat it up.
While there outside the poor birds go
To look for dinner in the snow.
Let's share with them! I think—don't you?—
The little birds get hungry too.

THE HOLY NAME

Oft when I hear the wind and see
The flowers blow, it seems to me
Nature bows down because the breezes
Have whispered the sweet Name of JESUS.
Dear children, when that Name is said,
Let's bend our knees or bow our head.

AT NIGHT

Of course it's very dark in bed
When shades are drawn, and prayers are said,
And Mother shuts the door.
But God, you know, is called the Light;
And He is with you all the night.
So be afraid no more.

GRATITUDE

It is a pretty sight, I think,
To see the feathered creatures drink :
With every drop of water they
Lift up their heads as though to say
"We thank You." Ah, if birds can be
So grateful, children, can not we?

JOY

Laugh much, dear children ; learn to smile
While you are free from care.
For life's a climb of many a mile,
With brambles everywhere.
An evil man was never glad ;
But merry boys are seldom bad.

CHIVALRY

A mother is a priceless pearl ;
Its faithful guard, her son.
And yet a gentle little girl
He teases "'cause it's fun."
But only think ! some day or other
A boy will call that girl his mother.

MAY PROCESSION

The lights leaped up in jets of flame, the tapers
gleamed like stars;
The sun through painted windows flung his red and
emerald bars
Of jeweled rays caressingly and circlingly adown
To weave a coronal of light for a Maiden-Mother's
crown.

And other mothers, other maids waited with breathless
hush,
With a prayer for Bill and little Anne, with perhaps a
pious push
To catch a glimpse of the cross before, to see then
follow after
The happiest pilgrimage on earth, as happy as angel
laughter.

Children around the long wide nave a living wreath
they threw,—
Clean little girls in clean white frocks, clean little boys
in blue,—
They crowned the church, themselves the crown; they
sang Our Lady's praise,
Themselves each one a lyric, a forecast of heaven's
Mays.

Clean little girls with fillets blue circling each curly
head,
With golden sash, or cincture white, or loops of scarlet
red;
And little lads with shining eyes, embodiment of
spring,—
Could Mary ask more precious crown than the hearts
that children bring?

Garlands of fragrance veiled the shrine in perfumed
aureole;
It might have been lilies and incense, but I think it
was childhood's soul . . .
Mother, I came in procession lone; no wreaths at your
feet I piled,
But I laid my heart on the roses, and you made me
again a child.

CHILDREN

They trust us, they believe in us; and, so,
Up the steep hill they go,
 Their hands in ours.
 Like little flow'rs,
Into our eyes they smile,
For we, their sun, have warmed their hearts awhile.

We trust Him? We believe in Him? Then you
And I are His children too,
 Smiling anon.
 So, on and on
Over each little hill
We go, regardless save of His dear will.

APPROACHING NOON

ADOLESCENCE

Rose white, but with a passion
As rose is red,
Or as its bud in fashion
Unopenèd
Holds in its close-drawn sheath
Of green and in its teeth
The crimson sword beneath of life unfed.

Naïve and new to wonder
And over good,
Knowing nor how to plunder
Nor how to flood
The garden with its scent
All ravishingly meant
To spend but be unspent in any mood.

With love and hate for dower
Unrealized,
With infinitest power
Imparadised,
It knows not in its leaf
Is latent joy and grief
And strength beyond belief as yet unprized.

Some day the sun, unhidden,
Will kiss where blows
The zephyr, and the hidden
Heart of the rose
May wake to madding pain
Of joy in Love's domain,—
May pray the cooling rain to quench. Who knows?

FIRE OF LIFE

You lay like molten lava in my arms . . .
Into that living lake of rosy charms
That vivifies and warms
My arid, age-cold senses like a tongue
Of flame, myself I flung.

You were the furnace gave me back my youth,
Not the famed pool of life; I sought, forsooth,
Only the burning truth,
And found you—you!—volcanic-breathing fire!
I found you, heart's desire!

Let them who will De Leon's waters quaff,
Thinking to wash away their years by half.
Love, we but look and laugh,
Who know that age by youth must purge and burn
Till youth itself return.

THE ADOLESCENT

All in an hour
Bursteth the flow'r
Of passionate youth from the passionless boy;
Under his tan
Groweth the man
With æons of longing for pain and for joy.

Carefree and gay,
Life was a day
Of leaping and playing and acting the churl.
Sudden the joke
Died when he woke
To beckoning lure in eyes of a girl.

Came like a sting.
What was this thing
To hold him and hurt him and fill him with ire?
God, what a pain!—
Needle-like rain
That cut him and turned all his blood into fire.

Startled is he,
Swept suddenly
Into an Eden he may not tread;
All unprepared
Fighting, blind, scared,
Voluptuous visions that daze his head.

One moment heav'n,
Then is he driv'n
Into the nethermost hell of fires
Fed by a girl . . .
Brain all aw whirl
Battling 'gainst youth's unopaque desires.

Bitter his laugh
As he would chaff
Dreamers who drivel of "rose-white love."
Never they'd see
Youth's agony
Bursting its bonds like a too-tight glove.

You who are old,
You who are cold,
You who have loved but who love no more,
Silence your tongue:
Once you were young
And blood madly coursed in your pulse of yore.

Love in a man
Leashed be it can,
But youth-love boils more the more despised;
Boils in his veins,
Maddening pains
Unchecked till it flood the imparadised.

VIRGINIA
(*Ætat Seventeen*)

What is she like?—

A rosebud glist'ning 'neath translucent dew,
Waiting the sun yet timid as it warms;
A fairy snowflake fluttering to view;
Clematis—scented spray of star-dust forms;
Smile that holds heav'n; ethereal breath of spring;
Crystalline bells alaughing in the breeze:
Similitudes can not her semblance bring
Whose vision is more sweet than all of these.

What is she like?

ON SEEING A BROCHURE CALLED
"HOW TO LIVE A HUNDRED YEARS"

To live, and live, and live . . . But, why?
Is age so good? is death so dread
That you must fear at last to die?
And can you think the happy dead
You, centenarian, forsooth
Would greet with joy as though you went
Flowering in unfaded youth
To don the cerement?

Myself, I do not ask to live,
When youth is gone, one day beyond.
I garner all that life can give
Whilst life is young and strong and fond,
And dangers lurk, and hearts take fire,
And one can hate and love and fight
And tingle to attain desire
And taste each mad delight;

Can battle with a friendly foe
And argue like a fiend possessed;
Can feel all passions' thrill, and know
A day into one hour compressed.
This, this is life and this I am;
But when is spent the glorious strife,
I wouldn't give a tinker's dam
For any more from life.

Ay, yet me live a hundred years—
By living two or three in each,
Nor know the senile smiles and tears
And bitterness that age must teach.
Let me go blithely, free from doubt
Just to where Youth begins to fail;
There let me, laughing, hurry out
Kind Death to hail.

THE HIGH ROMANCE

Death is a romance-knight in belted gold

Only the young, romantic called, dare woo.

But is he feared by long-lived men who, old,

Dread to be born romantic all anew.

Youth but suspects what age alone can know :

There is no sting in death save life have made it so.

MOTLEY

MY HOUSE

I know a pleasurable site,
And there I've built a place for me;
And all the day and all the night
It is the home of my delight,
Who hold the key.

Stranger, don't hang around the gate
And say you want to see the lot;
For there our paths must separate.
You say you would reciprocate?
Oh, I think not!

You must not come one step within
(Don't think me rude or merely smart,
And please forgive my happy grin).
You see, the house that I live in
Is my wife's heart.

DECEMBER THIRTY-FIRST

And home at last to his lonely dwelling
Time comes tottering, old and gray,—
Time who, only the other day,
Flew so fast there was no foretelling

He, in spite of his fierce rebelling,
Beaten and bruised would be brought to bay;
Now home at last to his lonely dwelling
Time comes tottering, old and gray.

Still with hope in his bosom welling,
He takes the hand of a child today,
And lower leans till, his ills compelling,
Yields to youth a new year's relay;
And home at last to his lonely dwelling
Time comes tottering, old and gray.

JANUARY FIRST

Neglected and lonely
And shivering all the day,
Here he stands, only
A waif who was cast away.
What is his cruel shame
Brought destitution?
Ah, can this be his name—
New Year Resolution?

Warm him and show him
The path through the weary year;
Then shall we know him
The prince of a cheery year.
But beat to their knees and take
Big restitution
From cads who in jest would make
New Year resolution.

WAITING

Fear Death? Not I!

My solitary fear is Life—

Beauty whose beauty is a lie,

Friendship is sham, and love is strife;

My solitary fear is Life.

Fear Death? Not I!

But, seek Death? No.

I nothing want, I only wait.

Not forward to the tryst I go,

Nor, restless, beat upon the gate;

I nothing want, I only wait.

But, seek Death? No.

BEFORE THE DAWN
(*For Laura Dock*)

Long ere the break of day,
When sleep's white wings—the moonlight—folded o'er
A world, to bear it far in dreams away,
I to a distant door

Trod through the echoing space,
And shot the bolt, and passed with trembling feet
Across the threshold, breathless, there to face
An earth with heaven replete.

Motionless stood. To creep
But for a space; to view the purity
Of Nature's vesture, woven while in sleep
Lay by a just decree

All a wild world, all sin,—
Only to see, to feel the awfulness,
'Twere as a glimpse of what earth might have been
As heaven bent low to bless.

High overhead the moon
In solemn silver majesty rode on,
And fainter spent her radiance till soon,
Dying, was born the dawn.

Wet with the kiss of dew,
The drowsy children nurtured in the field
Moved in their sleep: half consciously they knew
Soon to the sun must yield.

Silent as stood my heart
Breathèd the life around; with one accord
Each in the wordless vigil did his part—
Homage to Nature's Lord.

Only the willow tree
Swayed in the sacred stillness; only there
Sang the soft cadence of the pool, a plea
Wafted through scented air.

All was so silvery gray
(Alike some timid, low-voiced, praying nun),
I sped to meet my counterpart—the day,
And the hot-blooded sun.

ALTAR OF THE SKY

The lamp incarnadine—the sun
That swings from east to western sky;
The candles gleaming, one by one,
Are stars that mount on high.

But hangs before an ebon veil.
Then sing a solemn requiem hymn,
And bear sweet Day all cold and pale
Out to the vision's rim:

There waits a dawn to quench the light
Aflicker in the sockets gray,
And live a new-born holy rite,
And raise aloft a Day.

MARRIAGE OF THE MIST
(*Boothbay Harbor, Maine*)

The young blue mist with silver feet
Came creeping up the dawn,
Touching the trees and then, discreet,
Hastily running on.

As bride she rose from maiden bed
Where night began to pale
Along the water's brink, and fled
Trailing her bridal veil.

Up the cold dawn and up the hill
And up the day begun
Shyly but resolutely still
She came to wed the sun.

The shadows broke; the violet haze
(Sister of mist, the bride)
Called forth the rustling wind of days
Whereon the mist would ride.

And higher on the wind she rode,
And lower from above
The bridegroom swung from his abode
In golden rays of love.

One moment in her shimmering gown
She swept the sun's red rim;
Then in her love, as he hung down,
Dissolved herself in him.

THE ALSO-RAN

Not to the lions of success,
 They who have captured fame
By hook or crook or by lucky guess;
 I toast no begilded name.
But to idealist, assailed,
 . Beaten since time began:
Here's to the one that tried and failed!
 Here's to the also-ran!

Not to them for applause who lied,
 Or them who would take, not give;
But to them who lived for a cause and died
 Unsung that that cause might live.
I drink to them 'neath a star that paled;
 To eyes not our eyes can scan;
To visions that lookèd afar and failed.
 Here's to the also-ran!

To them with thrushes within their throat
 Loosed to be damned of men;
To them whose every poetic note
 Was pierced as it left their pen.
I will not trade the mad dreams of these.
 Rather one vision than
Conquering through the world's sane decrees.
 Here's to the also-ran!

To them who are buffeted and bruised,
Sentenced to silent pain,
Plans miscarried and trust misused,
Spent for another's gain;
Them whom the world has crucified
Because it knows not nor can
That divine failure theirs who tried . . .
Here's to the also-ran!

CRITICISM

When Il Gigante image was completed
And set upon its pedestal, there came
To Angelo one who assumed deep-seated
Technical knowledge meriting acclaim.
This Pier Soderini, then, objected
The nose of David seemed to him too large.
The master said the fault could be corrected,
And, smiling, filled his pocket with a charge
Of marble dust, a ladder gravely mounted
And made pretense to work upon the nose,
The while the marble dust let fall around it;
Then after a few moments struck a pose
And with expression questioning, sarcastic,
Turned to the learned critic, who, from strife,
Changed to admiring sycophant elastic:
"Name of a name! You give the statue life!"

BLINDNESS OF LOVE

You came to me in all your innocence
And placed your soul and being in my keep;
You came with but your virtue as defense,
And O my dear, I was too dull and dense
To know that you were Heaven . . . In my sleep,

Or sleepless thrashing through the night, I see
The Heaven whom I looked upon as Earth
And, looking so, pulled down the panoply
Till I had wrecked all heaven for you and me
And left us only purgatorial birth.

TO A CONFIDENTIAL DIARY

Dear one, you were made for a lonely soul
And a heart that could love, but a heart repressed;
For my secret sighs and a vague unrest;
Till you know the whole,
Till within your breast
Are the sad lines writ on the waiting scroll.

And the singing hours (though they be few),
And the days when pain is afar, and age
Is undreamed of: then on the fairest page—
Ah, if I but knew
When I ran to assuage
My doles, 'twas the eve of this joy with you!

MEDIEVALISM

My country and today! But, oh,
How difficult this loyalty
To those would live a long ago
In days of blood and chivalry!
Castle and joust and cavalcade!
And brush and quill and sculptor's blade!

When all the hills with laughter shook—
For all the hills were convent-crowned!
(Today know only scowling look
From factories that long have frowned.)
When artisans knew songs divine!
And each cot held a tapered shrine!

When love burned deep! and faith burned high!
And hate burned quick and fell away!
When men were not afraid to die!
And men were not ashamed to pray!
When guilds did not their labor shirk,
Because they gave to God their work!

When wars were won by armèd maids!
And fearless angels talked with men!
When children went on dread crusades!
Ah, holy madness reignèd then!
*Today so sane are we, our loss
Is foolishness of Jesu's Cross!*

OLD SWEETHEARTS

It's—it's—why, yes it is! It's *you*!

Clara! —er, I mean Jenny Belle!

How you have changed! I hardly knew
Those lilac eyes,—or are they blue?

How many years have flown! Eight? Ten?
It seems a century ago—

Those mad sweet summer evenings when
You loved me dearly, now and then.

What? It was winter when we met
And April when we said good-bye?
Of course! How stupid to forget
When your dear kisses haunt me yet!

Let's move: we're standing in a draft.
Do you remember that last night
When I was absolutely daft
About you, and you only laughed?

Youth is so cruel. Now we've aged
And so more gracious have we grown . . .
I wonder—er, if Love were paged,
He'd find we still could be engaged?

Our love is dead, its codicil,—
You managed that. But if we tried
With all our might, perhaps we still
Could somehow get a little thrill?

You laugh at me again! Buffoon! . . .
You have a husband and two sons?
Great guns! . . . 'Twill be one-thirty soon—
I was to 'phone my wife at noon!

A WOMAN SMILES

To smile man knows not how :
He looks benevolent,
Smitten o' love enow,
Or pleasèd, but I trow
He is not pliant-meant
Sufficiently to yield
Smiles away : his soul must he shield.

Like sky without a cloud ;
'Tis like digested book :
She speaks not for the crowd,
But woman smiles aloud.
Who cannot mask her look
Or features veil awhile,
Gives away her soul in her smile.

This speech form will betray
Her instincts instantly ;
Her burdens, secrets they,
Her smiles, give straight away ;
Reflect inanity
And all her virtues' shrine,
Now forlorn, now glowing divine.

But clever women hide
Their real secret selves
(As veil conceals the bride
Blushing unseen inside),
Their inner being like elves
Within their spirit ships
Behind factitious smiles on their lips.

TO A TYPEWRITER

When the September new moon jewels the sky
With filmy silver, mystically pale,
Alike a virgin peeping through her veil
In haloed contour, innocent and shy,
Her Hindu clients to their deity
Spread her an Orient feast the while they hail
The tools with which twelve months they did avail
For soul and body's keep to fortify.

You are my household god, through whom I keep
Body and soul together. Ivory keys,
Oft have ye yielded to my fingers' sweep;
Little plums coaxed from editorial trees.
So 'neath all moons I pledge a bumper deep
Of oil for your internal greater ease.

THE CHOIR AT THE SAVIOUR, MOSCOW
(1914)

In sight of all, yet veiled in mystery,
Each act symbolic, from the bow before
The royal gates until the chants that pour
For Emperor and Synod finally,
Is wrought the glory of the Liturgy.
Ten thousand—men, thank God!—sing and adore
The altar, sacred picture-screened, before;
Sing the Ectenia, or Litany.

Nor organ to distract the soul-born song
Flaming with love ahigh to heaven crying;
Rises in wave on wave; echoes along
The storied walls, its alleluias vieing
With homage-clouds of incense o'er the throng,
To meet 'twixt earth and heaven the undying.

CAP AND BELLS

ON A PORTRAIT OF A FRANCISCAN
(*To Edith Brégy*)

Miss Dove, Miss Dove, what have you done!

Is this ascetic friar I?

Your work unstinted praise has won;

My share has only been a lie:

Your genius made from yielding paint

"Portrait of Might-have-been-but-ain't."

And yet I love it and but smile

To hide the tears now nigh and nigher.

What happy days I sat a while

And you changed worldling into friar!

Nor is it quite a lie, I grant, —

For am I not a mendicant?

ON A MINIATURE OF THE DUCHESS
(For Clara Biddle Davis)

I look at her with eyes that never tire;
Reverent-awed my gaze, yet worship seizable
By secret yearning instincts inappeasable
And flame and pain as sweet as martyr fire.

'Mid satin folds that sheen and gleams impart
And tulle like timid half-caressing mist,
Kissing, the valley lilies nestle kissed
And ring their bells at portal of her heart.

I dare to look with battling pain and joy;
Unhidden as I look so do I dream . . .
And then her eyes gaze back and say, or seem:
"O nice but insufficient little boy!"

SHE WAITED IN VAIN FOR HER LOVER

As the incident might have been—

—reported by G. K. Chesterton:

I struck a match at Joseph's shrine
And prayed he make the Colonel mine;
But ah, the Colonel deserted me.
So shall I waste my tallow dip?
Gadzooks! I press it to my lip
And burn it to Saint Anthony,
To find the Colonel—or any he.

—philosophized by Paul Gèraldy:

You have left me. Yes. It was rather bad
that you took my rings to your newest find.
But never mind. I'll get more. Some lad
will be coming to comfort me. I'm unkind?
Well, perhaps. Yes, I fancy I am. But there,
don't you care. Ha, this is no tragedy.
The lad I shall get—who knows? Maybe he
will bring me the rings I used to wear!

—narrated by Edgar Lee Masters:

Out of me the grief of a bucket of tears.
What is this I tell you with the vibration of deathless
music?
Out of me the forgiveness of a million forgivings.
Sing it again, sing it to the winds of the West:
I am wedded to him, not through union,
But through separation.

—*eroticized by Laurence Hope:*

Under the stars I plead compassion
And lonely amber arms reach out
To fold you to myself, in fashion
One night you taught me. All about
The jasmine flowers breathe with passion,
And purple shadows wreath a doubt.

I faint with love and longing; broken,
Or breaking, weeps my heart for you.
You left with roseate words unspoken,
With lips unmoist by my lips' dew;
Only the jackal brings a token,
Sinking his fangs in veins of blue.

—*interpreted by Edna St. Vincent Millay:*

I shall forget you, dear, some day
(Quick! bring the smelling salts).
We've had our fling; now run away
(For my true love is false!).

—*told around the camp fire by Robert W. Service:*

She waited a year and then, I fear, she spat on the
stove and said "Damn!
I won't go stale if he hit the trail, and it's lucky, I
think, I am."
So the girl got dressed; and as for the rest, she filled
her poke with tin
And drank a toast to her lover's ghost in a hell-broth
jug o' gin,

—*proclaimed by Vachel Lindsay:*

Listen to my salt tears, ripping, dripping—
Drip! splash! drip, drip!

To be sung
or read with
rolling eyes.

Listen to them tripping, listen to them skipping

All through the valley, all down the alley:

Little pools of love

Spilled.

Splash! splash!

Boom boom, boomty-oom!

SPRING IN THE CITY

How do I know that it is Spring,
Here in our garret in the city?
The answer seems a silly thing;
Still, here it goes into the ditty—

No longer do I burn at night
Rejected manuscripts to warm you.
Are they accepted now? Not quite;
If so you're told, they misinform you.

The answer seems a silly thing:
In some delightful rural grove
I know it simply *must be* Spring—
Because I've had to hock the stove.

DOLCE FAR NIENTE

I never, never shall regret
The days that I have wasted;
But crowded hours, they haunt me yet—
The busy hours I hasted.

It is a very stupid thing
To trouble my poor head,—
For who sweet idleness will sing
When little me is dead?

But, lest the world should soon forget
The sweets for it I've tasted,
I never, never shall regret
The days that I have wasted.

CENTO AFTER READING THE LE GALLIENNE ANTHOLOGY OF ENGLISH VERSE

Came two young lovers lately wed (Tennyson)
On summer eves by haunted streams, (Milton)
And yet her voice is in my dreams— (Locker-Lampson)
Low sobs that shook their common bed . . . (Meredith)

For long ago in mating season (Dobson)
Jenny kiss'd me when we met; (Hunt)
That sacred hour can I forget? (Burns)
(Whisper not "There is a reason.") (Plarr)

Jenny kiss'd me, when we met, (Hunt)
Upon the eyes, the lips, the feet; (Dowson)
And down the long and silent street (Wilde)
Eternal summer gilds them yet. (Byron)

And sure in language strange she said: (Keats)
"Come back! Come back!" she cried in (Campbell)
grief;
"My days are in the yellow leaf (Byron)
Alp-high among the whispering dead." (Quiller-Couch)

"One kiss, dear maid," I said and sighed (Coleridge)
(The coward does it with a kiss). (Wilde)
"If love last, there were joy in this," (Arnold)
Thus the damsel spake, and died. (Chatterton)

Lest we forget!—lest we forget!
 (Should auld acquaintance be forgot?
 In English it's forget-me-not)—
Jenny kiss'd me when we met.

(Kipling)
(Burns)
(Old Song)
(Hunt)

Lest we forget!—lest we forget
 That, going hence with calmer feet,
 It is too hard, too hard to meet:
Jenny kiss'd me when we met.

(Kipling)
(Horne)
(Symons)
(Hunt)

SUCH IS LIFE

I wish I could dream in Paris
Near the Latin Quarter
In a dusty attic
Under a gambrel roof
Close under heaven,
With one dormer window—
A sooty casement window—
A dimity-hung window
Holding pots of geranium and lavender;
Outside on the leaded coping
Flocks of powters resting
Before flying to the Jardin des Plantes.
I'd like two near-Gobelins
On crazy cracked walls,
And a rook to talk to me
From his basket cage
Made of gray wattles
By a daughter of François Villon.
I'd like a broken bed
With jade-hued curtains,
And a little stove that smokes horribly,
And a little mistress who smokes beautifully—
A mistress petite and piquante and French—
Oh, very French;
Who would love me madly
And hate me still more—
All fireworks and moods;
Who could cook savory déjeuners out of nothing
And make bewitching frocks out of less.
And when we grew weary of love,

I'd like her to look at me just once
With a look I might carry to eternity,
And then slip quietly down into the night
And into the Seine.

Instead of which,
I live quite alone!
In practical America!!
In prosaic Philadelphia!!!
In an unromantic street!!!!
In a respectable house!!!!!
In a stupidly comfortable room!!!!!!
On the ground floor!!!!!!!
HELL.

PHLEGMATIC PROSE

"I'm one," she said, "who never goes
To trysting places 'neath the rose,
Nor daisy petals counts in June,
Nor listens to poetic rune.
I'm all for sane, phlegmatic prose."

"Is there one girl," I interpose,
"Who would not give her very nose
If she could with a poet spoon?"
"I'm one," she said.

Her frankness piqued me, I suppose—
"Look here," I said with voice that froze,
"What is your game, you bloodless prune?
I'll have to have your answer soon:
This is the last time I'll propose."
"I'm won," she said.

LOVE NOT

"Love not too well but wisely," say
They who would Wisdom's lore convey—
And wisdom is of fools supreme; .
"Let flow as deep and silent stream
Your love, but in a waste-away
Love not."

Rather than one sweet bliss allay,
Or miss, or lose, Love's rights betray,
I would take all, or sing as theme
"Love not."

This hour is Love's and his this day;
But not for long and not for aye
Can Wisdom's brook with ardor gleam.
Spurn Wisdom, and give all your dream
To binding fast without delay
Love knot.

TO THE UNKNOWN GOD

Within a northbound trolley at your side
In ecstasy I sat and scanned the view,
Though half my gaze was riveted on you
And my whole soul; all else within me died.
I worshipped you along that dusty ride,
And dreamed in former incarnation knew
Your Phrygian profile, eyes of Lydian blue,
Athenian torso,—Greece personified!

Did Phidias' scalpel mould those slender limbs?
And did you race and wrestle? Offer hymns
At sweet Narcissus' sylvan shrine? I see
You, unknown god, through all antiquity.
And then I hear you say, as from afar:
"Hell's bells! ain't this the damnedest trolley car!"

MY ITALY

Not o'er the treacherous wave,
 Though my loved Italy call me;
Paradise hung in the sun were a grave
After the kisses you gave,—
 Kisses that so do enthrall me,

Not for all Italy's wiles
 I from your lips would estrange me.
Here is my Italy! Dear coral isles,
Waiting 'mid ripples of smiles,
 Rover to lover you change me.

WHITE FLAMES

ONCE TO EVERY MAN

How oft can love to creatures be
In creatures shrined?

Has human heart capacity
For more in kind?

One loves but once.
Not in one mood immutably
For love one hunts;

Not a sole object; not one soul.
For as the rose
Of many petals forms a whole,
And as there glows
A jewel made
Of myriad facets, so in soul
One love is laid.

One loves but once; each seeming new
Is the same old.
And as the old from earlier grew,
The earlier gold
Older traced on
Its vein till that one love was due
At the world's dawn.

What seems amany is but one.
Since love began
Only it lives, as old as sun,
As old as man,
As old as earth,
Yet young as crocuses begun
At the Spring's birth.

WISTARIA

She, a frail living thing, crept round a tree;
Softly caressing, she
Closer drew warily;
So on his heart reclining grew apace,
Winning his love ere he reasoned the fixed embrace.

Then like a vampire cut the thriving vein
Short with her iron chain,
Laughing at all his pain;
Licking his life-blood till, a naked thing,
Withered he stood beneath coils that would ever cling.

But with his spent heart near her leaping own,
She, a green fairy grown,
Heard the expiring moan,
And in a pity spread her waking love
Over his limbs and wept blue-purple flow'rs above.

MILADY WAKES

Her young blue eyes, translucent-lidded, close
And curling lashes fringe her cheek—her cheek
Of real hue defying all critique
And silky-soft as Maréchal Niel rose.
Her wedding-ringèd hand awandering goes,
Somnambulant, to find me. Am I weak?
And shall I wake my Love before she speak
And restless-live shall be her dream's repose?

Nay; let me watch and wait and hold my peace
And worship in my vigil's worshiping
Until her dream is dreamed, and sleeping cease,
And sweet she smile: Then shall myself I fling,
Breathless, to call her back, expectant of
Her first returning kiss and constant love.

HEART'S GARDEN

A seed, a shoot, a leaf, a bud, a flow'r—
 A gorgeous hour ;
 And then
In frosty breath the wrinkled petals show'r
 Down from their bow'r
 Again.

A word, a glance, a slumb'ring answer, waking,
 Swift cometh, making
 Peace ;
Nor ever else when heavy heart-strings, breaking,
 Once that were aching
 Cease.

Love in the rose may fade yet knows no death : her
 Mem'ry clings with her
 Still.
And in our hearts, if loves can bloom together,
 Love in all weather
 Will.

INITIATION

And so, you understand. It seems so strange
And new that one has truly entered in,
Unbarred the rusty gates and seen the range
Of all that is, and will be, and has been;

Has loosed the locks to the most secret shrines
And plunged her soul into the soul of me;
Has read the never-to-be-written lines
And learnt unfathomable mystery.

It seems so strange: No more a citadel
Impregnable, for one has broken through
And found the avenues and farthest cell.
It seems so strange . . . *But O thank God 'twas you!*

THE UTTERMOST

When bloom of health suffused your cheek, methought
I loved you to the uttermost degree;
When our two hearts in one white fire were caught
And lips breathed language by no schooling taught,
I felt love could more fulgent never be;

Felt love had reached its radiant perfectness
When in your eyes mine eyes were mirrored there,
And on your lips soft trembled sweetest "yes,"
And heaven, smiling, leaned alow to bless
And answer in your one word all my prayer.

I thought I loved you far as love could go
When sang we songs our rapture bade us sing;
When dined we close together . . . Now I know
Love not by joys has faculty to grow
But by a very different sort of thing . . .

You lie in uncomplaining pain today;
Your hair is damp; in fever is your brow;
No sound escapes your lips that try to say
One little word to quiet my dismay.
But, ah, through this your suffering enow

I learn the real love: My heart nigh breaks;
I pace the floor; I fall upon my knees
And bare my soul to Him Who gives and takes;
Sleepless, I dread your sleep unearthy wakes:
I learn true love is made of such as these.

And when your wan smile stabs me like a spear,
You lie in pain, I helpless stand above
And choke with anguish and unuttered fear,
Not in our joy but in our sorrow here
I know the sacred perfectness of love.

IN HARBOR

I never dreamed such happiness as this
 Could flood the desert of my year on year;
 I never dreamed my dead life on its bier
Could rise anew from buried abyss
Into this most unutterable bliss;
 I never dreamed in my free-lance career
 Into calm lakes a smile my boat would veer
And keep it safely harbored with a kiss.

What dreams I dreamed are all forgotten now
 And memory begins with your first smile;
 The marking posts are hewn down every mile,
The dank decay is bedded in its slough;
 Nothing is left save one white page of life
 To glisten with the name of you, my Wife.

THE MIRACLE

I do not understand how it could be
That you were sent to me;
That that strong, pure, white, perfect soul of yours
My soul endures.
I can not comprehend; I only know
That it is so.

Perhaps to save me from eternal hell?
Or from myself? Ah, well,
Let me not pierce the mystery too deep;
Rather let keep
Unsolved, but dimly sensed, and never guessed,
The answer blest.

And suffer me, through night and through the day
All awefully to say
You are the lamp that guides, my light of life,
My strength, my wife;
You are—dear Love!—my better self are you!
Enough; 'twill do.

AWAKENING

Your love is so divinely true
I, human, am afraid of you.

You give with such unstinted hand
I, miser, can not understand.

You pour your love into my life:
At last I know you are my wife!

And all my soul awakes to view
And worship amaranthine You.

IN SANCTUARY

THE CHAMELEON

Rustling the parchèd leaves a saurian crawls
Over the crumbling walls;
Hideously it mawls
Victims allured by hue that doth bely,
Shifting with secret ease. Is the seducer I?

Swelling its chambered lungs at human gaze
Briefly its course delays,
While a new color plays
Over the glaucous granules: red leaps high—
Stain of returning ills. Is the returning I?

Let but the reptile carry any name,
Also was I the same;
But from its fickle fame
Rise enow white, and spurn the vagrant dye
With a loath heart, mayhap, but a new cleaner I.

IN A GARDEN

With Mary-love my heart was gay,
The while I passed the time away.
Adreaming dreams on Lady Day:

I saw a garden wall enclose
A labyrinth, where soft there blows
The petal of the wind-tossed rose;

And heard a whispering through the firs,
And song of floral choristers;
And sought to find the gardeners.

Nor found within a sentinel
Save Cedars round a Sealèd Well,
And glens of Pink and Asphodel,

And Virgin's Bower and Briony,
And Mary Mint and Lady Key,
And Thistle Fluff of Saint Marie.

Their rustling flew upon the air—
The song of Rose and Maiden Hair—
To tell of her who dwelleth there,

And ask of her to pluck and bless
Her chosen flow'r, and to caress,
And soft upon her heart to press.

And lo! I seemed to see, with tread
So soft nor bruised the Brachen's head,
The Blessèd Mother pass through red

Woodbine and Mary's Pinch, and stand
Beside the Well All Sealèd, and
Her heart unclose with willing hand.

And every flower and blossom there
Stretched up upon the trembling air
To see the heart its chosen wear.

Then ceased the wind, the Rose its shower;
A hush o'erspread that verdant bower:
Our Lady held the *Passion Flower!*

Its purple depths with red emboss,
Its cords and nails and, oh, its cross
Brought to her mind our gain, her loss.

And she for us the Passion chose,
Nor Lily pure nor ardent Rose;
Her heart th' Atonement did unclose.

Nor other flowers that ever grew
Within that garden wet with dew
Were wet with tears of her who knew.

Still in that vale they sing and blow;
But round the Well the Passions grow,
And fill the world and overflow;

While to her heart their Blessèd Queen
Still clasps the Passion Vine terrene,
Till earth and heaven she holds between.

THE LITTLE DAY

We can be brave for a day ;
Love can be harbored by all ;
Each can his own battle fight
Till the nightfall.

However heavy, his work
Any can do for a day ;
Sweetly can live till the sun
Fadeth away.

All, while the shadows collect,
Part of the ladder can climb :
And this is our life—only one
Day at a time.

I, BROTHER MOLE

Year after year untiring rustles by
The motley concourse: cavalcade of kings,
And thrice-crowned popes habited wondrously,
And there a war-scarred veteran who flings
His banner to the breeze, and there again
Delvers with hairy chests, and wretched knaves
Bartering souls for pleasure, mothers of men,
Saints fighting sin, virgins reclaiming slaves.
Year after year the cruel crags they climb
Or sleep in veiled delights of damnèd slime.

And I,—and I sit idle all the day
Here in the brooding shadows while they haste;
Timid and weak, not valorous as they,
Not sharing in their winnings or their waste;
Making no moan because of my unworth.
Simply content to be alive a while,
I hide amongst the little things of earth
And learn to say a prayer or two, and smile . . .
Yet times I seem to see HIM sit with me
And watch the others making history.

MENTAL PRAYER

Silent and listening,
Faint with desire,
Close to the glistening
Seraphim choir,
White wings sweep back, glimpsing the goal:
This is the breathing of the soul.

MYSTICAL COMMUNION

Faint and more faint
Soundeth the voices of material men;
Whilst from the soul unslaved from mortal ken
Groweth the saint.

Deep and more deep
Burneth the purging wounds of love; despair
And desolation fall before the fair,
The spirit sleep.

Still and more still
Standeth the heart, from trembling brought release;
And through the silence wafted is to peace,
T' adore His will.

Sweet and more sweet
The valley blooms, as through the bright array
The Bridegroom treads His solitary way
The soul to greet.

Nigh and more nigh,
Till lost in a consuming unity—
Not essence, presence, pow'r: these causal three
Long since passed by—

But, thus begun,
The mystic chain so close around has grown
All else is lost and perfect, stands alone
The consummate *one*.

MOTHER O' MINE

Rosemary here I lay,
Mother o' mine;
Under your shrine
Rosemary here I lay.
This little flow'r, they say,
Remembrance means. Today
Please to remember me
When you smile down to see
Under your shrine
Rosemary here I lay,
Mother o' mine.

What do you plaintive sigh,
Mother o' mine?
Soft from your shrine
What do you plaintive sigh?
"Can one her child deny?
Can she forget? Not I."
Please to return the flow'r,
Lest I forget an hour
Soft from your shrine
What you do plaintive sigh,
Mother o' mine.

INTERCESSION

They are forgotten, but not we;
The gray wall closes from our sight,
Alike a veil of endless night,
Their faces we were wont to see,
Now e'en from memory.

We have gorgotten them; but they,
Each one within her silent cell
Remembers, ah, remembers well;
And through the years they for us pray
Who do forget the way.

And shall we with a morrow's sun
Remember Him? And shall we kneel,
His hand in ours, His presence feel?
Attribute it, when grace is won,
To some forgotten nun.

CLOISTERED

White lilies by the world unhurt,
They yield a fragrant life of prayer;
And oh, to realize that He
Within their midst is dwelling there!

For greater joy is theirs to know
That, not so much they stand apart
As, rather, sheltered JESU is
Within the cloister of their heart.

BALLADE OF THE SORROWFUL MOTHER

Why do you weep, sweet Mother, all the day,
And all the night lament in silent woe?
Why do they name you sorrowful alway,
And whisper of the grief of long ago?
Did Simeon's sword release the fearful flow
Adown your eyes to flood the world's lone reef,
Where through the mist gleams soft no promised bow?
And this the reason for the silent grief?

Amany make white swaddling clothes today,
And when their hour is come nor child they know;
But you drew down high heaven where He lay,
And knew Him God Who travailed here below;
Saw the white tender blossom in Him grow;
Saw Him nailed high, on either side a thief;
And heard the words, and felt the spirit go.
And this the reason for the silent grief?

Were this the plough that furrowed up the way
Wherein your tears fell fast, the seed to sow,
There would I bid the passion vine decay;
For other mothers lose and smile. But, no;
Because we strike again the fatal blow,
Again, again cry out the sentence brief,
And crucify until the red wounds glow:
And this the reason for the silent grief.

L'Envoie

O Mother, let no more the tears o'erflow:
We shall ne'er wound our Love beyond relief,
Nor ask again if we be heaven's foe
And this the reason for the silent grief.

PHILANTHROPY

The Rivers of Philanthropy

Without true love are ditches ;

The poorest men on earth are they

Who nothing own but riches.

Love maketh fairies of the givers,

Who change the ditches back to rivers.

LITTLE, LITTLE FLOWER

God loves even you who abide
Sweetly frail in the forest, or hide,
 Little flower, too shy to be seen,
 'Neath the clover thrice nodding its green
Through the dells of the dark mountain-side.

And you, little soul, open wide,
That the heart of me quick may confide
 A secret: My soul, I have seen
 God loves even you.

Little flower, bloom on: you've outvied
The forest her strength and her pride.
 My soul, let your borders be clean
 While you grow little flowers between,
Till you give what He gave when He cried:
 "God loves even you."

IN THE LANTERN BEAMS

There is no room for them within the inn!
The door is closed. You turn, Joseph, to her,
With words you cannot utter in your eyes;
Hearing the voices and the ribald song—
The voices from the inn—you turn to her,
Weary and heart-sick do you turn to her,
The words you cannot utter in your eyes.

She knows, and smiles divinely in reply,
Your awe of her increasing manifold;
And through the gathering dusk you gain her side;
You falter through the shadows to her side,
With wondering awe increasing manifold,
And look with tender pity where she stands,
Pity and awe increasing manifold.

Her eyes are happy stars the while she smiles.
She seems to feel nor hunger, nor fatigue,
Nor thirst (though these are yours), nor yet the night,
Nor morrow's sacred pain the while she smiles
And Bethlehem's star is dim: Her little Boy
To be a Brother of the Poor is come,
Who have not whereupon to lay their heads!

So, through the dewy grass she threads her way,
While you behold within your lantern beams
A sorry stable . . . All at once the night
Breaks in a thousand glories from on high!
And through the dewy grass they thread their way—
Those little shepherds. Joseph, earth's Rich Poor
Do you behold within your lantern beams!

LOVE'S PRAYER

Teach me to love Thee, Lord:
Without one thought of heaven winning,
Nor from hell's fear assured release;
Not for the plaudits of the sinning;
Not even for interior peace.
Giving, nor looking up to take
Return of love as love's reward;
But only for Thine own dear sake
Teach me to love Thee, Lord.

A NOVICE, ON THE LADY POVERTY

Not in a trailing gauze bedewed with gold,
Where in a shimmering fold
Clasped are two jeweled hands;
Nor with white temples bound by silver bands,
Crowning a mist of splendor where she stands;
But in a poor disguise,
Pale but sublimely fair, my bride I recognize.

Down the long vista of a future year
Slowly she draweth near,
Gathering as she goes
Jewels from earthly crowns there to disclose
Far richer gems—eternal rest to those
Who, as they wanted naught,
Have by their gift and vow more than the whole world
bought.

For poverty is having unseen wealth.
So, for my poor soul's health,
Eager I rush to meet
My waiting spouse; and kneeling at her feet,
Freed from earth shackles, find in that retreat
Riches beyond compare
Stored in my heaven's palace, waiting to crown me
there.

ON POETS AND POETRY

THE MUSIC OF POETRY

The lilt of the lyric, the language,
The cadence, the rhythm, the stress,
Whatever its metrical dress,
Whatever its verse form, sheer music
The soul and the heart is to me
Of true poetry.

You may hear but the blatant barbaric,—
The shrill-shrieking sirens, the blare
Of blasting of horns on the air,
The clash of the brass of the cymbals,
The low muffled roll of bass drums,
And snapping of thumbs ;

Or the melody homely and restful,—
The lowing of kine, and the warm
Vesper hymn of a thrush after storm,
The silvery substance of fluting,
The whispers and laughters that breeze
Through tall forest trees.

Or, again, it may come as a choral,
Majestic and throbbing and grand,—
The surge of the sea on the sand,
The thunders of violoncellos
And organs, and through them the sharp
Clear cry of a harp ;

Or a motif sustained and heartaching,—
The souging of snow in the eaves
And wailing of rain on dead leaves,
The night winds murmuring, whirring
And moaning in lone solitude
With sobbing subdued.

The lilt of the lyric, the language,
The cadence, the rhythm, the stress,
Whatever its metrical dress,
Whatever its verse form, sheer music
The soul and the heart is to me
Of true poetry.

TO ALL TRUE POETS

Poets are set apart, by world as fools,
By heaven as the interpreters of men;
Wiser than mossy theorists in schools
Who blindly do incarcerate their ken;
Poets' the right to be condemned as mad
Who live a crucifixion and are glad.

Yours is the will to dare to walk alone,
Communing in the silence of the soul
On vigil-visioned scenes to man unknown
And alien to drab, his daily dole;
To laugh but little yet to bring a smile
Unto pale lips, world-weary, for a while;

To be immured from man, yet with him live
To sweep the stars and seraphs to his ears;
To gather milky moonlight and to give
As smiles the rainbow and the rain as tears;
To watch the restless from your restful land
And, singing, make their souls to understand.

O Poets, far-off bards of heart's desire;
O Poets, supermen to whom I kneel;
Whose least line kindles parchèd eyes afire
And least invisioned rapture I would feel,
Look at my hungry soul, my starving heart,
And flood me one ray of your perfect art.

BEFORE COMES ANGEL DEATH

Before comes Angel Death I pray that I
One verse may write, then die,—
One poem perfect, haunting, that will live
Beyond my hand can give,
Trailing its cloudlings loosèd from my pen
Trembling 'neath hearts of men.

Hold me, O Muse, close claspèd to thy breast,
Mine ears alistening prest
To sense the rhythmic pulsing and to hear
Syllabic runing clear.
Show me the imagery overlaid;
Beneath it, thoughts unafraid.

Not for acclaim: 'twere dross I toss away.
But when I go for aye,
Let me leave one inalienable line
To make thy luting mine
And feel, my Muse, thou sheddest not a tear
That thou didst hold me dear.

Not to attain an end but, with high heart,
By vision-steepèd art
To fling myself into the choiring stars,
Where driven pilgrim wars
For moulding mad idealism,—things
Only his lone harp sings;
Where his, the solitary flooding praise
Circles, and sings, and stays.

BAUDELAIRE

What esthete dares
To blame the pearl, born of disease? His art,
Pearl-like, the product of its counterpart,
Is Baudelaire's.

No matter where
Its cause and inspiration, poetry
Which lovely is has that its right to be.
So Baudelaire.

TO JOHN BANNISTER TABB

The light that faded from your eyes
Grew richer from your pen,
Till dazzling gates of Paradise
Gave back the sight again;

And from the vistas of delight
Your stars with gleaming kind
Make clear the path through earth's long night,—
For we alone are blind.

"WHO IS LIONEL JOHNSON?"

So asked me some one in that mundane world
Whose denizens know those who with them walk;
Who bow to Persons as to flags unfurled;
Who fight and guzzle; wastrel-word who talk.
So asked me one who turnips knows and yeast
And hence, affrighted, not with gods would feast.

How can she walk with Lionel a space?—
She who treads paven streets, not twilit dell
And forest-depth and footless, far-off place
And crawling gray cloud and soft honey cell?
How can she speak with him whose word but sings
Of high, austere, impenetrable things?

He will be never great in eyes of man
Save only theirs who, solitary, go
Off from the garish world, the world to scan
With visioned eyes that only poets know.
And who is Lionel Johnson? Never mind:
To tell her, knowing her, would be unkind.

STILL-BORN

If my name live at all, I would
Be known then, not as essayist,
Maker of stories bad or good,
Or weekly newsprint columnist,
But one who dreamed with poet soul
And, dreaming only, missed the goal.

One who of visions did not want;
Nay, who had more than he could bear.
Whose secret soul would, soaring, chaunt
Of things too far for man to care;
Whilst golden pen, afraid, alas!
Could only strike a sounding brass.

Not made; that poets such are born
Say the supremely cruelly wise.
The verdict, nor with hope forlorn
Accept, but with inseeing eyes
That glimpse my birth through parted way—
A poet died in me that day.

THE SEALED DOOR

Soul-surgings thoughts too sacred-sweet
To sell like baubles in the street
Are shrined in every poet.
Who run may read the written line,
But never can their ken divine
Nor imagery know it—

The singing of his secret heart,
Perfection of imperfect art;
Nor rhyming line would show it.
A song he sings, the song he sells;
But hidden deep within he dwells
Unheard, the wordless poet.

A POET, TO MOTHERS OF MEN

Yours be the grace
To bring forth humans God-create, a race
That hews a niche for service and for place.
My power imbred,
Itself creator, to imagery wed,
Causes, conceives, and bears to life ere long
My sons of song.

Mothers of men,
I to maternity am not alien:
Though man, a mother now and else again
Am I that wrought
And gave to being children of my thought.
Your travail share, your joy when in the morn
A poem is born.

Only there be
A difference vast betwixt our progeny:
Your sons are bred to full activity
On firing line;
Whilst purpose is nor is excuse for mine,
Save for the sake that is their beauteous own,
And that alone.

PANTOUM

I'm sick of the old forms of verse;
I say, let us try something novel.
Whether editors flatter or curse,
To sonnets and odes we won't grovel.

I say, yet us try something novel,
Not villanelle, ballade, or rondel.
To sonnets and odes we won't grovel;
Vers libre is too ticklish to fondle.

Not villanelle, ballade, or rondel;
Allegorical chants-royal pall;
Vers libre is too ticklish to fondle;
The triolet's doomed for a fall.

Allegorical chants-royal pall.
How about a revised form Malayan?
The triolet's doomed for a fall,
But the pantoum is worthy a pæan.

How about a revised form Malayan?
De Banville and Gautier tried,
For the pantoum is worthy a pæan.
Austin Dobson did one but it died.

De Banville and Gautier tried
(A pantoum is pleasant and easy);
Austin Dobson did one but it died
(It is terse and concise, yet it's breezy).

A pantoum is pleasant and easy,—
You see how it ripples along?
It is terse and concise, yet it's breezy.
I'm having much fun with this song.

You see how it ripples along
In a series of fours without limit.
I'm having much fun with this song,
But if you are weary we'll trim it.

In a series of fours without limit,
A pantoum's a joy for sore eyes;
But if you are weary we'll trim it.
(The last stanza holds a surprise:

Two lines we'll repeat from the first.)
To sonnets and odes we won't grovel,
But it's fun a pantoum to have versed:
I say, we have tried something novel.

TO A WEED

Here amid the rose and rue
Are you just a little lonely?
And would happy be if only
Daffodils would smile at you?

I am not a daffodil,
Close beside you in the garden;
I'm a poet-weed.—Your pardon,
But do critics call me nil.

So I know the heart of you
As no daffodil could know it,
Little Friar Minor poet
Here amid the rose and rue.

QUATRAINS

ROMA—AMOR

Men wonder that we love you, Mother Rome.
They know not that the very name you bore
Through all the years is Love and you, love's home:
For *Roma* but reversed is *Love—Amor*.

TO FRANCIS THOMPSON

I read thee and I weep; for I perceive
All heaven thou drawest 'neath thy pen,
But when for us her colors thou dost weave,
Unloosest her again.

THE CHORD

Three notes that were, and are, and toward
Unending time shall be
In one, harmonious, peerless chord:
The Holy Trinity.

EVOLUTION

Out of an opaque blackness came a mist;
Out of a misty grayness came a light;
Out of a void came Love and, having kissed,
Never will day again return to night.

THE CATHEDRAL

A cloud of marble lace entrapped by man
And held, on earth, a prisoner from heaven;
Whence all its chiseled loveliness was riven
To wing back souls of Milan's motley clan.

POSTHUMOUS

I crushed my heart in pestle of my breast,
I cried aloud, and flung the world away . . .
And then, with love all buried in decay,
You, Love, would weave a nest!

TO A CIGARETTE

Ambrosial poison, Circe do I name thee,
Luring to ruin 'neath thy reeking hill;
Yet, cruel siren, mistress must I claim thee,
And ever will.

IN MEMORIAM

"A FIRE SHALL BURN BEFORE HIM"

*(In memory of six Sisters of Charity of the Incarnate
Word, burned to death while rescuing over
a hundred orphans, October 30, 1912)*

The living sacrifice, the pyre
That lighted heav'n that night,
An outwardly consuming fire
Was to the inward light
That lit their hearts disparity;
So burns the heart of Charity.

Elijah in his flaming car
Was swift to heaven drawn;
But they, each one a glowing star,
Still shine across the dawn
To light the way ere we expire,
Poor moths entranced by earthy fire.

The Pentecostal tongues of flame
From God to men were given;
But they, when that their message came,
Gave tongues of flame to heaven.
May we with little orphans see
The love that burns in Charity.

BILLY
(To His Mother)

As evening Angelus rang clear
The Angel Death came down today,
And where one angel entered in
Two angels flew away;
To Him Who gave his sweet soul sings,
And we have but his clay.

But God was good: The gift was yours—
The soul He gave your soul imbues;
And now, still perfect, give you back,
Too pure for life to use,
That lovely soul. I give but tears
Who have no child to lose.

For to have borne him honor was
And privileged maternity;
And had he lived or had he died,
Your very self is he.
God gave him nigh eight years of life;
You give eternity.

THE NURSERIES OF HEAVEN

(To Mary, My Daughter; Died at Birth)

Go, little daughter, to the realms of light
To play with Mary's angels evermore;
Go, little soul, baptized, transcendent white,
The nurseries of heaven to explore.
Back to that blessed shore
Make haste ere we your passing shall perceive,
Lest we, forgetful, grieve,—

Forgetful of the honor God has sent,
Who parents of an angel made of us,
Our flesh incarnate, child to us but lent,
Still very self. Shall we, less generous,
When He would have you thus,
Deny Him? Nay, we give Who gave the gift
And thankful eyes we lift,—

Thankful that we could offer of our best,
Our treasure and the answer to our prayer;
Could send to Him Who sends us angels blest
An angel all our own t' attend Him there
And our place to prepare,
An angel born of quintessential love,
Our messenger above.

Go swiftly, angel messenger, and say:
"Jesu, my Brother, let me hold Your hand
When You and I with angels walk today
In sunny gardens where white lilies stand
Around the throne a band,
And let me on Your Mother's breast recline
Whose name is also mine.

“And bless my parents, Jesu, for You know
They watched and prayed and waited long for me,
Nor saw my smile nor heard my voice below.
Send peace that their hearts filled again may be.
For Jesu’s sake. Amen.” Can we
With sadness mourn, when of ourselves we’ve given
A very part to heaven?

We weep, but these are tears of thankfulness
That our ewe lamb is safe within the fold;
That she is with the angel babes who press
’Gainst Mary’s knee and Jesus’ hands who hold.
She will be never old,—
Eternally our baby, and are we
Parents eternally.

MEMORIAL DAY

Not flowers do they crave
Who have dust upon their eyes;
Heap not lilies on the grave
Where my lily lies.
Beyond the veil each cries
To his playmates everywhere,
Not flowers do they crave,
But faith's fadeless prayer.

EPIGRAMS, APHORISMS, MAXIMS

EPIGRAMS, APHORISMS, MAXIMS

Pleasures are like liqueurs, alas!
Safe only from a tiny glass.

.

Most inscrutable-looking men
Are thinking of nothing, but women don't know it.
Any the trick can practice when
He be not in love, or be not a poet.

.

When woman forgets an injury,
Her mind gyrates a bit:
She keeps forgetting, consistently,
That she has forgotten it.

.

Some steal humility by a fumble;
Only the great are truly humble.

.

If you make love to her she feigns dismay;
If you do not, a woman's heart turns gray.

.

Some people would rather be gossip-gored
Than simply politely to be ignored.

.

A little orgy now and then
Is relished by the best of men.

Monstrous they are, those people who
Behind your back say things of you
Absolutely entirely true.

Always one can be gentle as a lamb
With those for whom one doesn't care a damn.

The difference 'twixt caprice and stronger
Eternal passion, is,—the first,
Capricious love, lasts slightly longer.

To pure all things are pure, as said Saint Paul;
But to the prude there's nothing pure at all.

In dinner-giving, the great feat
Not food but to know how to pair.
Men think of what they're giv'n to eat;
Next whom they sit do women care.

Wishing to shirk an engagement plan,
A débutante lies like a gentleman.

Anyone can be what he is not;
Indeed, most of us are. But to be what
One truly is, ah, that is subtlety,
That is the hardest thing on earth to be.

Never damn the ignorance of youth,
Nor call his inexperience uncouth:
His fresh opinion, fearless, views the truth.

.
When reading biographical opination,
Remember truth will not bear publication.

.
Keen ridicule blights sturdiest moral vermin;
A burlesque word is oft a mighty sermon.

.
Britons never slaves will be,
So sing they in their knavery.
When Britons learn to sing that they
Never will masters be, that day
Shall make an end of slavery.

.
Earth can no sorrow feel
Flattery cannot heal.

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